

# Middleton seeking 5th Senate term

## ■ Local lawmaker ponders presidency bid after Miller

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If he could turn back time, Sen. Thomas "Mac" Middleton wouldn't have gotten into politics.

"If I were starting my career over again, I probably wouldn't choose politics because of how partisan it has become," he said.

But the Maryland Senate's only full-time farmer said there's also a rewarding aspect to being an elected official and it's the chief reason why he's seeking a fifth term.

"What gives you the momentum is when you're in a position where you can really affect what happens in Annapolis in a positive way," Middleton said.

"My dad used to say, 'The biggest abuse of power is having it and not using it wisely,'" he added.

The 64-year-old Waldorf resident is one of the county's most well-known politicians, having served two terms as a county commissioner before moving to Annapolis in 1995. He got his start in politics when he was young from his father, Henry Middleton, who was regarded as a godfather of Charles County Democrats.

In Annapolis, Middleton is one of the most influential and respected legislators and is widely considered a possible successor to Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller Jr. As chairman of the Senate Finance Committee since 2002, Middleton is a leading voice on complex policy matters, including utility regulation and health care.

During this year's legislative session, Middleton brokered an agreement between labor representatives and the

business community that aims to reduce long-term unemployment insurance costs. People on both sides of the issue credited Middleton with relentlessly working to strike a deal.

Middleton doesn't deny that the possibility of one day leading the chamber has motivated him to run again.

Miller (D-Calvert, Prince George's) said at a Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland meeting earlier this year that Gov. Martin O'Malley would be the last governor he serves under, a statement that reflected both his confidence that O'Malley (D) will win a second term and that he would not run again in 2014, if he is re-elected this year.

"The opportunity and personal satisfaction of one day being president of the Senate is very inspiring to me," Middleton said.

But that's probably at least four years away. This fall, Middleton said he plans to highlight his record on school funding and affordable tuition as well as his ability to reach compromises on thorny issues such as unemployment insurance.

He also will tout his leadership on renewable energy initiatives, tying the reimbursement rate for mental health providers to increases in inflation, improving access to dental care for low-income residents and establishing a prostate cancer pilot program in Charles County to get more men screened and treated early.

"I'm going to let my record demonstrate that I've worked very, very hard for the people

of Charles County," Middleton said.

He's aware that any challenger — so far, Republican Jay Bala is Middleton's only opponent in the primary or general election — probably

will criticize him for voting in favor of \$1.4 billion in tax increases in 2007 that helped balance the state budget.

"It's part of my record; there's no hiding it," Middleton said. But he maintained that it enabled the state to maintain its priorities in education, public safety and health care.

Despite the anti-incumbent mood, Middleton thinks it's more of a national movement than one that will impact state and local races. Still, he said he expects Bala, whom Middleton defeated 65 percent to 35 percent in 2006, or another general election opponent will try to attack his record and credibility.

One thing Middleton said he won't be dealing with this year is a party slate that he formed four years ago with Dels. Murray D. Levy and Sally Y. Jameson, along with Waldorf businessman Gregory Billups.

The move, which was made to provide a diverse ticket reflective of the evolving district, angered some local Democrat activists who considered it a snub of Peter Murphy, who eventually won in the primary and general elections.

Times have changed since then, Middleton said, noting the election of two African-American county commissioners. No slate will be formed this year, even though Levy (D-Charles) is retiring, leaving one of the district's three seats open.

"I'm focused more on my own race," Middleton said.

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